

NW Arkansas Championship

Thursday, September 24, 2026

Rogers, Arkansas, USA

Pinnacle Country Club

Maria Jose Marin

Shauna Taylor

Press Conference



Walmart
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PRESENTED BY **P&G**

MATT JESUS: All right, very pleased to be joined by Maria Jose Marin and Coach Shauna Taylor ahead of the Walmart NW Arkansas Championship presented by P&G. Coach, start with you. I think we have five Razorbacks current and former in the field. How proud are you to kind of see the representation of your program?

SHAUNA TAYLOR: Yeah, I've been here for all 20 events so I always love this time of year. It feels like a family reunion having all the girls back. They come out to our facility and practice and speak to the girls, just share. They bring their friends. I know Carlota Ciganda was at Blessings yesterday practicing. That's just a really cool thing for our team.

Obviously to get Maria in the field and now Reagan Zibilski, kind of her LPGA debut, it's a special week, one that I really cherish and love every minute of giving back to the community and also watching my girls come back and watching our current players.

MATT JESUS: For you Maria, no stranger to competing on our Tour this year, but to kind of do it in not hometown, but your second home here in Arkansas, what is it like to tee it up this week?

MARIA JOSE MARIN: Teeing it up this week is always amazing. I think it's one of the weeks that we look most forward to, and we're always waiting for this week to come because it's just the town, it's all about the tournament, and everyone is pretty excited about it. I mean I'm no exception.

After what happened last year after we got rained out it was a bummer, so I'm pretty excited about this year. And also being my senior year, so also kind of like to do one last year and, yeah, just finish it up in the best way possible.

MATT JESUS: And Coach, for you, to see the different generations of Arkansas players, Maria is very close with

our LEAP program, to Stacy Lewis who just announced her retirement last year, how cool is it to see all your different Razorbacks played all their careers here?

SHAUNA TAYLOR: Yeah, I'm like a proud mama bear. To see our girls, being a part of it with Stacy in the very first one through today, I'm so proud of the way they mature and use this week to kind of measure where their games are but also just get to meet people.

We don't get to play at home a lot so this is another opportunity for our girls to showcase their talent, and just really proud of them and all they do. Whether they've gone in the working world or retired on the Tour, it's so special to know they came through our program and had a forever impact.

MATT JESUS: Maria, 17 points in our LEAP program. Very, very close to it. How much of that is still top of mind as we kind of wind down our season here?

MARIA JOSE MARIN: So the LEAP program is pretty present on my mind. 17 out of 20, it's just -- if people see it from the outside they would say it's baby steps, but it's really hard to get those three last points or even getting those last points.

This week it's going to be an important one. Of course I'm going to be thinking about it, and also thinking about having fun, getting to play good. I know that I can perform really good on the scores.

So, yeah, just take all that to my advantage, and, yeah the points will be a result of all that.

MATT JESUS: To have the Razorback support this week, how special is that, especially calling the Hogs on 17?

MARIA JOSE MARIN: Calling the Hogs on 17 is a tradition unlike any other. We were over earlier in the Women's Summit and three people came up to me and just said, yeah, we're going to be on 17 calling the Hogs and we expect you to do it, and of course I'm going to do it. It's one of the things I'm excited.

So, yeah, I'm going to do to tomorrow. Going to play well,

... when all is said, we're done.®



have fun, yeah, just enjoy all the tournament has to give us, and, yeah, give out to the Razorback community.

MATT JESUS: As Coach said, Reagan is making her LPGA Tour debut. Have you given her any tips? I know you're not fully on our Tour, but like I said, played a lot on our Tour this year. Have given her any tips teeing it up this week?

MARIA JOSE MARIN: Well, we talked about what it's like and what a future on the LPGA can be. Of course her as a pro right now and playing on the Epson I know she's pretty excited about this week. She got the exemption and was really happy.

So just have fun I think is the key thing, because it's really easy to get into the place of I'm competing in my first one and getting all nervous.

Yeah, just have fun. Yeah, just try to take it as a walk in the park. She's been here. She knows the course, too. She's familiar with it, yeah.

MATT JESUS: Coach, I know you talked about how the community gives back to you guys and you giving back to the community through your program. How awesome has that been to see the full circle there?

SHAUNA TAYLOR: Yeah, one of the pillars of our program is giving back and kind of engulfing ourselves into the community that pours into our school and into our program.

Yeah, it's a special week. We kind of showcase a lot of the work we do throughout the year through my Choose Confidence Kids Club out on 16, 17, 18.

Then we do Fassi's Friends and we do a lot of engagements. I want to show the girls how important it is to make a difference and leave it better than you found it.

Q. Maria, how is your game right now, and are there a couple of different things you're working on in particular?

MARIA JOSE MARIN: I feel my game is good. It's at a good level. Of course I've been working on some things technically. Yeah, it's just trying to like find ways to always improve my game, and it's -- that's how this sport is. Always trying to find little things on how to improve and how to be better.

Of course there is no magic recipe to it, so, yeah, I feel pretty confident. Of course I'm going to go all out tomorrow and we're going to see how it works out and how all the

preparation works out tomorrow.

Q. Shauna, you have been around this event for many, many years; pretty much all the years. Lots of Razorbacks playing in the field. What does that say about the quality of your program at the University of Arkansas to keep putting really good players in this field?

SHAUNA TAYLOR: Yeah, I became coach -- this is my 20th season. My goal was to make this a destination women's golf school. I think we're on the track to do that.

I want kids when they hear college golf in the U.S. to think of the University of Arkansas Razorbacks. We work tirelessly as a staff with Mike and Martina to do that.

It takes amazing people coming through, like a Stacy Lewis, a Gaby Lopez, a Maria Fassi, and Maria Jose Marin.

It is just a tireless effort of trying to find great women to come here and be a part of this program and buy into what we're doing.

Q. How much have you seen the event just grow each year, and what does that mean to you just living in Northwest Arkansas?

MARIA JOSE MARIN: I love this community. Northwest Arkansas is a tremendous place to live. I'm lucky I get to do what I love to do here with amazing people.

I think over the years it's become just almost a big festival with the golf tournament. There is just so many awesome things that you can do on top of watching the best players in the world play golf here.

You can do yoga. You can go for a run. You can ride your bike. If you love food. There is so much for everyone and I think that's what makes this event so special. It's been really cool to watch the engagements grow over the years.

Q. Maria, just an outstanding amateur player. I believe No. 4 in the world. National champion in 2025 individual. How do you handle all the pressure of just what people expect of you, and how do you translate that into playing really, really good golf?

MARIA JOSE MARIN: So expectations and handling expectations as athletes is something we have to live with. Just kind of remind myself that I have to perform for me, and, yeah, just keep reminding the reason that I play golf is because I love it, I have fun, and I don't know what I would do without it.



Yeah, just keep those little things in the back of my mind, and, yeah, using that pressure if you can call it or expectations of people to just try to be better every time.

Of course there is always going to be a comment, so, yeah, just put it in the back of my mind and just go out there and do me for me.

Q. Absolutely. How special is it to play in an LPGA event in Northwest Arkansas with so many of your friends doing the hog call and cheering you on this weekend?

MARIA JOSE MARIN: It's super special. I think this event, it's one of the, if not one of the most fun events that I get to play in. Even if you ask some LPGA Tour players they love this event and just the environment and how it's organized.

Yeah, getting to do it with a lot of people that I know, Reagan and then seeing Gaby, Maria, when Stacy played, like all of that history is amazing. Great seeing the hog representation and, yeah, it's super fun.

Q. In the earlier press conferences Brooke Matthews and Reagan both talked about it. If you could go into your Choose Confidence program, how that started and how cool it is for you to see all of these kids come out, all the busses come out every week, and explain more about what the program is.

SHAUNA TAYLOR: Yeah, Choose Confidence is a program that I started in COVID with my little girl, Grace. She's ten. I know when our girls come to play for us they're 18 to 22 and their confidence level is pretty much already established. We can try and move the needle and helped them a lot, but I really wanted to try and figure out way to help the little kids learn and self-talk is like, learn what loving yourself before you can love others means.

So I was inspired in COVID. I had time on my hands and was tired of being an at-home teacher for my little girl. We developed Choose Confidence and I was lucky enough to partner with Proctor 7 gamble for this. I created a monthly program in our schools. I am in eight elementary schools; over 1200 kids get to be a part of my program.

It's themed monthly. We have a big workbook, they get a confidence kit, and we kickstart the year here at the LPGA event at our Kids Club for the kids to come out.

They get to see an amazing golf tournament and get to experience firsthand what it looks like to build confidence through art and science and technology and golf and other

sports.

So it's a super special week. It's a labor of love. I call it my night job. The kids inspire me to keep doing it. And then it was stuff that even we do in our locker room today, so it's a special week that we get to showcase my program. It's really cool to see how it's impacted young people.

Q. Maria, how much has that program rubbed off on you? How important is that to you as a player and also to your teammates?

MARIA JOSE MARIN: I know that Choose Confidence is a program that Shauna developed with all her love in her heart, and of course with the help of Grace and inspiration from Grace.

We got to get involved in that, and just to see the impact that it makes on the kids, I mean, we get to pack kits for the kids and do a lot of stuff to get involved with it. I know this year there is a lot of Latin community and Choose Confidence has a lot of kids that are Latin.

In great efforts of Shauna just trying to expand language, getting the handbooks translated to Spanish. Those little details and all the meaningful things is amazing to see.

I know it makes a really huge impact on the kids. And, yeah, because as Shauna says, they're getting to grow up confident. It's what I think -- it's a term that they don't know, so just giving them keys and like tips to grow that, it's amazing.

SHAUNA TAYLOR: Can I add, too? Maria and my Latinas that have played for me inspired me to want to translate it to Spanish. I know our community is in need of that and I really want Choose Confidence to be inclusive, but our players are the ones that put that in my mind and really I think helped me expand the program this year into Spanish, which is really cool to see.

Q. It is a really special program. Another one that Maria is a part of that's been going on for several years is the sponsor invite program from Arkansas. Working with the University of Arkansas and here to allow a sponsor invite for your players. A lot of other programs around the country are now implementing that at LPGA Tour events. You started that. How important is that for you to introduce the LPGA Tour like Maria, to introduce the LPGA Tour to the players so that they can get their feet wet for their next professional steps?

SHAUNA TAYLOR: I think when everyone comes to play golf for us their main goal is they want to become an LPGA



Tour player and a star. The fact of the matter is only about 10% really get to do that. What we want to do is give them the opportunity to play against some of the best players in the world.

It is golf based, but there are other things -- we call it the Road to the NW Arkansas Championship. One, you have to be in good academic standing. You have to have above a 3.0 GPA. No two, teach them how to write a sponsor request letter. Not just like, hey, I want a spot in your tournament, but to make it personal. And three, we want them to have an updated resume that's really professionally done.

Through that at the end of the national championship, the player with the best ranking gets the opportunity to compete in this event. So a sponsor's exemption.

So there is criteria they must fulfill, but what a great way for players like Maria and players before her to get to test their game.

It's a home golf course where they know it. It's familiar. We've come out a couple times in the last few weeks to give them some more opportunities to prepare.

Yeah, it's been a homerun for us in recruiting. It's a great little tip of our hat when we're talking about you want to play the Tour, we can help you do that.

Q. You talked about the 28th anniversary a little bit. For you personally, what does it mean to you not only as your 20th season as coach, but it's also the 20th anniversary of this tournament? What does it mean to you personally?

SHAUNA TAYLOR: Well, I think the best story that I can think of is Brooke Matthews. She grows up here in Pinnacle as a kid. She came to my golf camp and she played golf for us. She was one of those kids lined up to get autographs on her hat, and now she gets to play on the LPGA Tour as a member.

The growth, the opportunities that it's provided our community, the engagements that it allows us to get involved and know people. We just did the Women's Summit. There was 1500 amazing female leaders in that room.

It is just so awesome to get to share that with our community and to showcase what a really special place we have here.

Q. Maria, can you speak to what this tournament has brought to you, what sort of value it's brought to you

having this opportunity to play in this through the years?

MARIA JOSE MARIN: The value this tournament has brought to me is just all in terms of experience and growth. Coming here to the University, as Shauna said, this tournament and getting a sponsor invite into this event, it's a huge recruiting advantage for my future.

I didn't know at the moment if I was going to be -- or if I was going to pursue a professional career, but I do want -- what I did want was the opportunity to get to play here and, yeah, just showcase our golf to the community.

It has brought me a lot of experience on what to expect from the Tour, just to handle pressure. How to control myself on the course.

Yeah, growth personally, yeah, just made me a better player and always looking forward to playing in this event. Yeah, just like letting myself dream, dream big. Yeah, getting to be in this means I can do good in another events.

Q. Hello to you both.

SHAUNA TAYLOR: Hi.

MARIA JOSE MARIN: Hi.

Q. Coach I was hoping you could go back with me to the first one. Set a scene for what it was like. What was the vibe like? Obviously I know there was rain. But what it meant to Stacy.

SHAUNA TAYLOR: Oh, wow. I think for Stacy to get that opportunity to play at a Tour event at home during her time at Arkansas was, I don't know, I think it kind of put it on her radar what her life might look like.

Then to go out and play the round she played the first round and to be leading the golf tournament I think was just the beginning of what we all know was an amazing career.

Yeah, it's just -- and we needed to get a boat to finish it out. It was so fun to get to share that with her. Also the maturation and growth that comes from opportunities for players like her.

You know, there is just some comfortableness that comes with it. Getting to test your game and have your friends and teammates around and our community. I think it was the kickstart of what has become one of our favorite weeks of the year.



Q. Maria, if I'm correct I think you came on a recruiting visit during this event, is that right?

MARIA JOSE MARIN: Yes, I was. One of the best trips that I ever made. It was so, so fun.

Q. So tell me about it. What was your impression of the event? Who did you watch?

MARIA JOSE MARIN: Well, my impression of the event was it was all fun. I got to spend time with Shauna and I saw the Choose Confidence program. Getting to see all the little kids and how she leads them basically was an amazing way to see how an amazing leader she is.

Getting to see all the involvement the program had on the event, yeah, the girls getting to help and getting an opportunity to see the LPGA Tour players. I remember seeing I think that year Brooke was playing. Yeah, just getting to see her and all the support she got from the community being from here.

Yeah, then later them showing -- yeah, showing me what the event was about. I saw myself in here.

And then getting to dinner with the girls. Everything was so fun. I really recall it because it was my first recruiting visit to a university.

I found myself comparing everything to this place.

MATT JESUS: Thank you both for your time. Maria, best of luck this week.

MARIA JOSE MARIN: Thank you.

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